

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-06

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 2986

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, BG, PK

SUBJ: BDG FOREIGN MINISTRY'S VIEW OF BHUTTO TALKS

REF: DACCA'S 2966.

SUMMARY: FOREIGN MINISTER KAMAL HOSSAIN AND ACTING FOREIGN SECRETARY FAKHRUDDIN AHMED, IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH ME YESTERDAY AND TODAY, HAVE NOT BEEN QUITE SO STARKLY PESSIMISTIC ABOUT OUTCOME OF BHUTTO TALKS AS MIGHT BE SUGGESTED BY LINE TAKEN IN THE BDG PRESS. DESCRIBING RESULTS AS A DISAPPOINTING SETBACK AND CYNICAL ABOUT BHUTTO'S PERFORMANCE HERE, THEY NEVERTHELESS EMPHASIZE THAT DOOR IS STILL OPEN FOR NORMALIZATION. THEY TOLD ME THAT AT LAST MINUTE BHUTTO PROPOSED ACCEPTANCE OF 10,000 ADDITIONAL BIHARIS, A PROPOSAL WHICH IRRITATED MUJIB BUT WHICH HE NEITHER REJECTED NOR ACCEPTED AND WHICH, ACCORDING TO THE ACTING FOREIGN SECRETARY, COULD FORM THE BASIS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSIONS. THEY ASK THAT WE USE OUR INFLUENCE TO MOVE NORMALIZATION ALONG. END SUMMARY.

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2. I HAD A BRIEF CONVERSATION AT A RECEPTION YESTERDAY WITH

FOREIGN MINISTER KAMAL HOSSAIN ABOUT THE BHUTTO VISIT, AND A LONGER SESSION TODAY WITH ACTING FOREIGN SECRETARY FAKHRUDDIN AHMED IN HIS OFFICE. THEIR REMARKS ARE CONSISTENT WITH AND SLIGHTLY SUPPLEMENT REVIEW OF THE TALKS CONTAINED IN REFTEL.

3. DIVISION OF ASSETS. THEY SAID THAT DRAFT CONVENTION SUBMITTED BY BDG, PROVIDING FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AND INITIATION OF COMMERCIAL RELATIONS AS WELL AS SCIENTIFIC AND EDUCATION EXCHANGES, ALSO PROVIDED FOR DIVISION OF ASSETS AND REPATRIATION OF BIHARIS. ON ASSETS, ORIGINAL BDG POSITION MENTIONED 56 PER CENT AS BANGLADESH'S SHARE BUT THEY LATER AMENDED THIS TO SIMPLY ASK FOR STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE THAT THERE SHOULD BE AN EQUITABLE DIVISION OF ASSETS HELD AT TIME OF INDEPENDENCE, THE SHARES AND DETAILS OF WHICH SHOULD BE REFERRED TO THE JOINT COMMISSION WHICH THE PAKISTANIS WERE PROPOSING. THEY ALSO SUGGESTED THAT SOME RESTORATION OF EASILY IDENTIFIABLE ASSETS--AHMED MENTIONED PAKISTANI GOLD RESERVES, FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES, IMF BALANCES, AND PIA PLANES--SHOULD BE MADE WITHIN TWO MONTHS TO PROVIDE IMPULSE FOR NORMALIZATION. BDG ALSO AGREED TO ACCEPT CORRESPONDING SHARE OF LIABILITIES. BHUTTO HAD REPLIED THAT HE COULD NOT DISCUSS THESE DETAILS AS HE HAD NOT BROUGHT HIS EXPERTS, A POSITION WHICH JARRED BENGALIS AS HE HAD BROUGHT 107 IN HIS PARTY AND WANTED TO BRING CULTURAL TROUPE OF 60 MEMBERS UNTIL Dacca REFUSED ON GROUNDS OF LACK OF ACCOMMODATIONS. BHUTTO PROVED ADAMANT ON THIS, INSISTING THAT HE WAS HERE ON GOOD WILL AND EXPLORATORY MISSION, ALTHOUGH AHMED INSISTS THAT BDG FOREIGN MINISTRY HAD ADVISED PAKISTANIS BEFOREHAND WHAT THEY WANTED TO DISCUSS. MEMBERS OF BHUTTO'S PARTY ALSO TOOK LINE THAT BHUTTO DID NOT SIGN AGREEMENTS ON HIS TRIPS ABROAD.

4. REPATRIATION. BDG DRAFT PROVIDED FOR FULFILLMENT OF EARLIER AGREEMENTS ON REPATRIATION, ACCELERATION OF THIS REPATRIATION, AND JOINT CALL ON INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO CARRY IT OUT. BHUTTO HAD RESISTED, EXPLAINING THAT POLITICAL PROBLEMS IN PAKISTAN MADE THIS DIFFICULT AND ALSO REFERRING TO PAKISTAN'S "SATURATION" WITH REPATRIATES. HOWEVER, AT THE LAST MINUTE, DURING THE EXTRA TWO HOURS OF THE VAIN SEARCH FOR SOME PROGRESS, BHUTTO HAD "WHISPERED" TO MUJIB THE SUGGESTION THAT THEY MADE A SECRET AGREEMENT FOR THE REPATRIATION OF AN ADDITIONAL 10,000. THIS DID NOT APPEAL TO MUJIB--THERE WOULD BE CONFIDENTIAL

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AN OBVIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEM FOR THE OTHER 300 AND SOME THOUSAND BIHARIS WHO WOULD BE LEFT AND WHO WOULD FEEL THAT REPATRIATION FOR THEM WAS THEN CLOSED--BUT HE DID NOT REJECT OR ACCEPT THE SUGGESTION WHICH THERE WAS NO TIME LEFT TO SERIOUSLY EXPLORE. NEVERTHELESS, AHMED NOTED, THE PROPOSAL WAS LEFT OPEN AS A POSSIBLE BASIS FOR FURTHER NEGOTIATION.

5. NEXT STEPS. AHMED SAID THE TALKS ENDED ON AN INCONCLUSIVE NOTE

WITH NO SPECIFIC PROVISION FOR FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS. HE POINTED OUT THAT MUJIB HAD ACCEPTED THE INVITATION FOR A RETURN VISIT, WHICH WAS INTENDED AS A POSITIVE SIGNAL, BUT THAT IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO PREPARE THE GROUND FOR THIS VISIT WITH TALKS AT A LOWER ECHELON. THE INITIATIVE NOW LAY WITH THE PAKISTANIS, WHO HAD BEEN INVITED TO STUDY THE BANGLADESH PROPOSALS.

6. UN ISSUE. AHMED SAID HE THOUGHT IT WAS SIGNIFICANT TO RECALL

THE WAY PAKISTAN HAD BEHAVED WHEN BDG MOVED RECENTLY FOR ADMISSION TO UN. BHUTTO HAD SENT MUJIB AN URGENT MESSAGE ASKING HIM TO DELAY UN ACTION AND WAIT FOR BHUTTO'S VISIT TO DACCA TO DISCUSS IT. THIS HAD PROMPTED BDG TO SEND AHMED FROM MOSCOW TO NEW YORK TO ASSESS SITUATION WHICH LED TO DIRECT CONTACTS WITH CHINESE REPS IN NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON, FROM WHICH BDG DISCOVERED THAT CHINA WAS NOT AT ALL SO RIGID AS PAKISTAN SUGGESTED. THIS EXERCISE HAD ALREADY RAISED SERIOUS DOUBTS IN DACCA ABOUT PAKISTAN'S INTENTIONS.

7. BANGLADESH ATTITUDE. AHMED CONCLUDED BY ASSURING ME, AND ASKING ME TO CONVEY TO WASHINGTON, THAT BDG REMAINED COMMITTED TO PEACE AND RECONCILIATION IN SUBCONTINENT AND THAT IT WOULD PURSUE PATH OF NORMALIZATION WITH PAKISTAN. THEY WERE DISAPPOINTED AT SETBACK THEY HAD SUFFERED IN THESE TALKS, BUT THEIR DOOR WAS STILL OPEN. BDG WAS ASKING ITS FRIENDS, AND WAS NOW ASKING US, TO CONSIDER USING THEIR INFLUENCE TO MOVE THIS NORMALIZATION ALONG. BDG WAS GRATEFUL FOR PAST US SUPPORT IN FAVOR OF NORMALIZATION AND HOPED WE WOULD HELP AGAIN.

8. I TOLD AHMED THAT I WOULD CONVEY HIS REPORT AND REQUEST TO DEPARTMENT. AS HE KNEW, WE FULLY SUPPORTED GOAL OF NORMALIZATION AND HAD BEEN HIGHLY APPRECIATIVE OF STEPS WHICH BDG HAD TAKEN TO FURTHER IT. WE REGRETTED THAT OUTCOME OF THESE TALKS HAD NOT BEEN CONFIDENTIAL

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MORE POSITIVE BUT I WAS ENCOURAGED TO HEAR THAT BDG INTENDED TO CONTINUE ITS EFFORTS FOR RECONCILIATION, WHICH WAS IN EVERYONE'S INTERESTS.

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